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Summer Service Learning — What Distinguishes Students Who Choose to Participate from Those Who Do Not?

Part Two: Gender, Goals, and Influences on Spiritual and Educational Development

by Mary Beckman and Thomas A. Trozzolo

This research report continues the discussion of differences between students who undertake Summer Service Project Internships (SSPI) through the Center for Social Concerns and those who do not. As noted in Report 3, approximately 200 students travel to cities across the U.S. every summer to do service as part of a three-credit course.

As many studies suggest, students who volunteer and participate in service-learning differ from those who do not (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, and Braxton, 1997; Fitch, 1991; Serow, 1991; Allen and Rushton, 1983). We sought to confirm this hypothesis, and identify differences characterizing our students.

Figure 1.

Gender: Female percentage of SSPI participants and Notre Dame undergraduates: 1980 - 2001

Sources: Center for Social Concerns Data & Office of Institutional Research's Annual Factbook

Report 3 described our method, noting that we had questionnaire data from 698 students, 10% of whom did summer service within two years of completing our survey. Thus, we were able to compare responses of students who did not take the three-credit summer service-learning course and those who did.
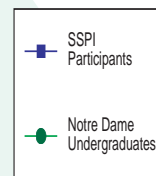
We discussed, in our last report, differences related to students' religiosity, their parents' volunteer behavior, their involvement with the Center for Social Concerns, and their attendance at talks and other events pertaining to social issues. Here we will address gender differences, and differences between the two groups' future goals. We will also discuss students' perceptions of the effects of various campus entities on their spiritual and educational development.

Figure 2.

Percentage of students who report these goals are important or very important to them: significant differences between SSPI and non-SSPI students in 1999

- Have administrative responsibilities
- Be very well off financially
- Be successful in a business of my own

NDSL Survey, n=698

Gender

Approximately 65% of Summer Service Project participants are female. The number of females in the SSPI has increased over the years, but so has the percentage of women admitted to Notre Dame (see Figure 1).

Life Goals

In contrast to the 1960's and 1970's, when giving and responsibility to others appeared to be more important to college students, young people over the last decade are more likely to place importance on financial success (Astin, 1991; O'Brien, 1993). Our data showed that students who participate in the SSPI, however, were less focused on future monetary well-being than their non-SSPI counterparts. Being wealthy was reported as important to a significantly smaller percentage of students doing summer service than those who did not do an summer internship (see Figure 2).

Having businesses of their own and holding administrative responsibilities likewise registered as important goals for fewer SSPI students. Those who did not participate in summer service-learning generally appeared more business-oriented.

Figure 3 shows differences on these same questions for several years prior to 1999. It is noteworthy that wealth, administrative responsibility, and business ownership have increased in importance for both groups over the years. In 1994, for example, just 20.8% of SSPI participants reported wealth as an important goal, compared to 33.7% in 1999. By contrast, 50.5% of the non-SSPI group noted the importance of wealth in 1994, versus 54.5% in 1999.

There is no significant difference between the two groups on a variety of other future goals (see Figure 4). Raising a family was considered important by over 85% of both groups; over 75% of students in each group reported that developing a meaningful philosophy of life was important to them and more than 60% of students from both groups reported that becoming an authority in one's field was an

Figure 3.

Percentage of students who report these goals are important or very important to them: significant differences between SSPI and non-SSPI students in 1994 through 1999

- Have administrative responsibilities
- Be very well off financially
- Be successful in a business of my own

Sources: Institutional Research Reports: October, 1994 & July, 1996; NDSL Survey, 1999
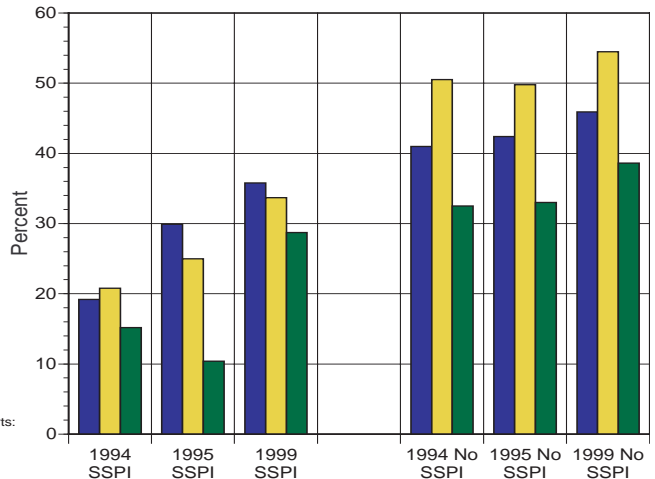

Figure 4.

Percentage of students who report these goals are important or very important to them: insignificant differences between SSPI and non-SSPI students in 1999

- Raise a family
- Develop a meaningful philosophy of life
- Become an authority in my field
- Obtain recognition from colleagues for contributions to my field
- Influence the political structure
- Be accomplished in one of the performing arts
- Write original works
- Make theoretical contributions to science
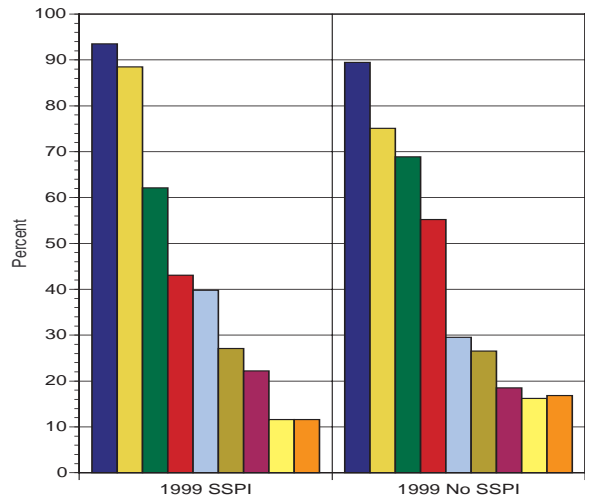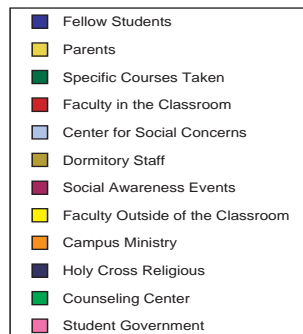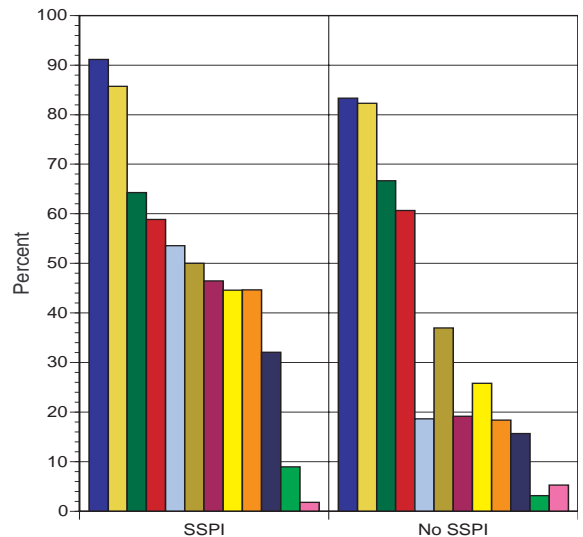- Create artistic work

NDSL Survey, n=698

Figure 5.

Percentage of students who indicated these contributors were dominant or important to their spiritual and educational development in 1999 (by rank order for SSPI students)

- Fellow Students
- Parents
- Specific Courses Taken
- Faculty in the Classroom
- Center for Social Concerns
- Dormitory Staff
- Social Awareness Events
- Faculty Outside of the Classroom
- Campus Ministry
- Holy Cross Religious
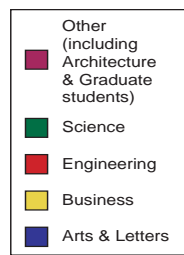- Counseling Center
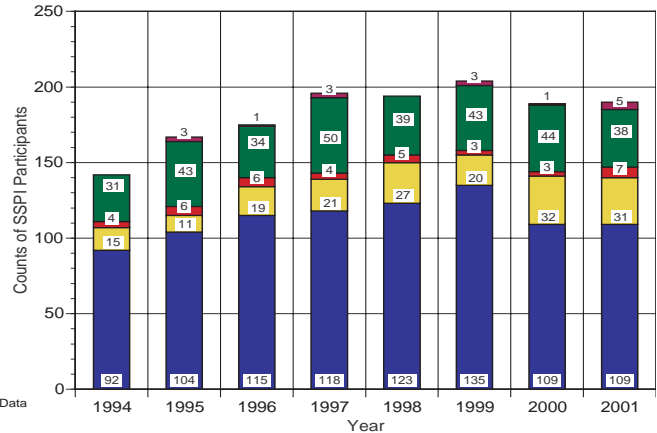- Student Government

NDSL Survey, n=698

important or very important goal. But in neither case were the two groups statistically distinguishable.

Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference for the goal of obtaining recognition from colleagues for contributing to my field (though 55.2% of non-SSPI students and 43.1% of SSPI students reported that the goal was important to them). The remaining goals were important to less than 40% of students in each group, and again the differences between the groups were not statistically significant.

Figure 6.

SSPI participation by college: 1994 - 2001

Legend: Other (including Architecture & Graduate students); Science; Engineering; Business; Arts & Letters

Source: Center for Social Concerns Data

Influences on Spiritual and Educational Development

Figure 5 shows, in rank order for the SSPI students, the percentage of respondents who said each person or group identified had a dominant or important effect on their spiritual and educational development. Those who took on summer service learning noted stronger contribution from almost all sources.

We noted in Research Report 3 that parents exerted a strong influence on students in these areas; so did the Center for Social Concerns and campus social awareness events. Each showed significant differences across cohorts. Here we present the extent of influence of other entities on campus, as reported by the students in our study.

Faculty in the classroom and specific courses students took at Notre Dame were acknowledged as important or dominant contributors by over 50% of respondents. However, there was no statistically significant difference between groups for these contributors.

There was a clear and statistically significant difference, however, in the reported importance of faculty outside the classroom. Nearly half (44.6%) of SSPI students noted that faculty exerted an important or dominant influence on their spiritual and educational development; the figure is 25.8% for the non-SSPI students.

Student residence hall staff was influential, more so for SSPI students (50.0%) than for those not doing summer service (37.0%). Campus Ministry was also noted as a major or dominant influence for 44.7% of SSPI students, whereas just 18.4% of non-SSPI students thought likewise. Other campus contributors that significantly differed between SSPI and non-SSPI students and were more influential with SSPI students included the Holy Cross religious community (32.1% vs. 15.7%) and the Counseling Center (9.0% vs. 3.2%). Student government seems to have limited influence.

Summary and Reflections

To summarize, SSPI participants, the majority of whom are female, tend to be less concerned with making money, and generally appear less business-oriented than the non-SSPI respondents. Based on self-reports, they place greater importance on the influences of faculty outside the classroom than do their non-SSPI peers. SSPI participants place greater value on the contributions to their spiritual and educational development of non-academic actors on campus, including residence hall staff, Campus Ministry, the Holy Cross religious community and the Counseling Center.

Women predominate in service activities at colleges and universities nationally (Fitch, 1987; O'Brien, 1993; Winniford, Carpenter, and Grider, 1995); our findings regarding gender, therefore, are not surprising. Whether we should apply more resources to alter the proportion of male and female students in service activities is a question we are exploring.

About 10% of SSPI students major in business. The figure has remained fairly steady over the last few years, as is seen in Figure 6. Meanwhile, roughly thirty percent of the student body majors in business, also a relatively constant percentage.

Studies on the effects of service-learning on students indicate that interest in the subject matter of the course can play an important role in the quality of the educational experience (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee, 2000). Knowing that many students who do not choose to do a summer service project have business interests suggests that more opportunities for summer internships in business would be worthwhile.

For the past three years, a summer internship with the international micro-lending organization, ACCION, has been available through the Center to business students who have taken marketing and/or finance courses. This program is small, currently accommodating only about nine students per summer. It is worthy of expansion, as funding becomes available. We are considering other

ways to address the interests of business students.

Faculty in settings outside the classroom appear to be more influential for SSPI students than for those who have not participated in summer service. Evidence is clear that service-learning can create excellent opportunities for quality faculty-student relationships, and such relationships are extremely valuable for our students (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). The Center is pursuing ways to strengthen these crucial relationships.

About 50% of SSPI students indicated that residence hall staff played a dominant or important role in their spiritual and educational development, 45% for Campus Ministry, and 32% for the Holy Cross religious community. As Figure 3 shows, these offices were much less important to the non-SSPI students. The Center for Social Concerns dedicates significant staff time working with social concerns commissioners in residence halls; the Center also has vital relationships with Campus Ministry and the Holy Cross religious community. We believe that such interactions encourage students toward summer service internships.

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